



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NEWS RELEASE

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DEMONSTRATION PROJECT TO INCREASE FREE MEAL ELIGIBILITY

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) – Kentucky and five other states are participating in a federal demonstration project that automatically will make students eligible for free school meals if their households receive Medicaid benefits.

Kentucky joins Alaska, Florida, Illinois, New York and Pennsylvania in the pilot phase of the project, which will begin on July 1 for school year 2012-13. The project is under the authority of the U.S. Department of Agriculture ([USDA](http://www.usda.gov)), which manages the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

The project is designed to connect eligible low-income children in all of the state's 174 school districts with free school meals automatically based on information received from Kentucky Medicaid. Including Medicaid beneficiary data is an expansion of the scope of the existing direct certification process. Currently, Kentucky school districts use an automated process to include Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program (K-TAP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beneficiaries on their lists of students who qualify for free school meals.

Including Medicaid data will allow for administrative efficiencies, reduce improper payments and streamline efforts to provide access to critical nutrition for children across the nation.

(more)

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The Kentucky Department of Education's Division of School and Community Nutrition will provide technical assistance to school districts as they implement this new model. Currently, 56 percent of students in Kentucky's public school system qualify for free or reduced-price school meals, and that percentage is likely to increase slightly as a result of this project.

The [passage](#) of the federal Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 marks the first time that states have been allowed to determine the effect of using Medicaid information with the direct certification process. USDA selected the demonstration states through a competitive application process. Under the legislation, the areas selected to participate will be expanded in future years, which will allow additional states to participate.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service will conduct a formal study to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects. The study – with the results published in reports to Congress in 2014 and 2015 – will estimate the following impacts:

- the extent to which direct certification for each demonstration category reaches children who are eligible for free school meals but are not certified to receive them
- the extent to which the projects directly certify eligible children who are enrolled for free school meals based on a household application
- the effect direct certification with the Medicaid program has on federal and state costs and on participation in the school lunch and breakfast programs

More information on the demonstration project is available [here](#).

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